

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Abrams Plains

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

NE Side SR1431, 0.7 mi. North of SR1435

CITY, TOWN

Stovall

STATE

North Carolina

☒ VICINITY OF

CODE

37

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

COUNTY

Granville

CODE

077

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

☐ STRUCTURE

☐ SITE

☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS

☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

☐ UNOCCUPIED

☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED

☐ NO: DEFENSE, MILITARY, OR OTHER

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE

☐ COMMERCIAL

☐ EDUCATIONAL

☐ ENTERTAINMENT

☐ GOVERNMENT

☐ INDUSTRIAL

☐ MUSEUM

☐ PARK

☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☐ RELIGIOUS

☐ SCIENTIFIC

☐ TRANSPORTATION

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. W. Pressley Davis

STREET & NUMBER

Box 146

CITY, TOWN

Stovall,

☒ VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Granville County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Oxford

STATE

North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

___EXCELLENT
___GOOD
___FAIR

___DETERIORATED
___RUINS
___UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

___UNALTERED
___ALTERED

CHECK ONE

___ORIGINAL SITE
___MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Abrams Plains is a frame farmhouse set on flat topography at the end of a long drive. It stands on an approximate one-half acre fenced-in area within thirty-six and one-fourth acres total land. The frame house consists of 1766 building parts joined to an 1830 house, all built over a high foundation. They are generally in a "C" shape plan on an east-west axis. Large hardwood trees in the front yard date to 1830 and earlier.

The exterior style is an example of rural, vernacular, transitional Federal to Greek Revival style. The 1830 front (west) building is a two-story block, three bays wide, and two bays deep beneath a fairly deep gable roof. Large windows contain twelve-over-twelve sash on the first story and eight-over-twelve on the second. All have miter molded surrounds and plain sills. The gable roof is flush to the gable ends, weatherboard are beaded, and double-end boards with vertical molding finish the house corners. Nails are an early machine-made type. The chimneys are twin interior. The front door is recessed, one step up from the porch floor, and is within a plain architrave with panelled reveals. Frosted and etched glass in wood mullions comprise the recessed sidelights and transom. All exterior doors have eight panels and there is a gallery door with transom above the front entrance.

Three porches exist. A front raised gallery porch, now one story with a shed roof was enlarged in 1880. It has four octagonal-in-section, tapered columns with Doric caps. On the north side, a one-story gable roofed portico is composed of a simple pediment, supported by four thin, tapered square-in-section columns with block capitals. There is a gallery along the back (east) of the 1830 house.

✓ The ca. 1766 buildings are much altered and consist of one and one and one-half stories, running east, then south from the 1830 house. These three exterior walls enclose an attached shed. Three exterior beaded, batten and board doors with hand-forged hardware exist on the exterior here. The windows have six-over-six and six-over-nine sash with molded, mitered surrounds. On the north side stand two exterior end chimneys. Both have smoothly mortared sandstone bases in horizontal bond courses, under freestanding brick stacks above stepped shoulders.

✓ The double-pile, central hall plan 1830 house interior has large-scale, high ceilinged rooms, each with a fireplace. There are four rooms on each floor, the two front rooms being slightly larger than the two rear. The stair is open string and rises three stories into the attic, starting toward the east wall to a landing. Walnut, nearly round-in-section handrails, supported by square-in-section balusters, are two on each step. Newels are turned and of urn derivation.

Three doorways to the central hall on the first floor have plain surrounds with crossettes, capped by a low Greek pediment, all with narrow applied molding. The remainder of interior door frames on the first floor are Greek Revival, symmetrically molded having corner blocks with simple, carved roundels. Interior doors are five panelled. On the second story, the surrounds are large scale, molded and mitered. Painted baseboards are high and heavily molded. The two front (west) parlors and the southwest bedroom have marbelized baseboards and mantels. All mantels are large Greek Revival: five are plain, three have simple decoration such as fluted pilasters flanking the fireplace openings. Walls are of painted plaster. All floor boards are four to five inches-wide fir.

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The cellar of the 1830 section shows two chimney foundations, reused from the original eighteenth century razed dwelling. They are constructed of stone rubble and faced with flemish bond brick. Each contain an arched fireplace.

A hallway between the 1830 house and the older section eastward is reconstructed old and new parts under a shed roof. An eighteenth century beaded narrow clapboard with rosehead nails lines the south wall. Behind this are two sets of enclosed reused stairs with winders pushed together into a "Y" shape. The enclosed well is panelled with approximately fifteen-inch wide, horizontal, beaded shiplap board.

The east (rear) three rooms ca. 1766 buildings are much altered. Two Federal style mantels with fluted pilasters on each side of the fireplace openings survive on the north wall of each north room.

A significant, eighteenth century house or house section stands on the southwest corner of the fenced-in area. The two-story, gable roofed, frame house is on a low stone foundation and has narrow, beaded clapboarding. The south end has no windows or doors and has a new clapboard finish; the other three sides have six-over-nine windows on the first floor and six-over-six on the second. Two Georgian exterior doors with original hardware are on the east side: one four panel, one six panel, both with plain, cut surround. ✓ The interior has a plain Greek mantel, and approximately twenty-one-inch-high panelling with chair rail of half-round molding. The southeast corner contains an enclosed stair with winders. Walls are plastered.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1766-1830

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Abram's Plains is a plantation named for a battle in the French and Indian War at the Plains of Abraham in Quebec. The plantation house, composed of eighteenth and nineteenth century components, reflects the long continuity of a single family's ownership of the plantation established by Samuel Smith (1729-1800) in 1766. Smith was a prominent citizen of Granville County in the pre-Revolutionary, Revolutionary, and post-Revolutionary periods, serving in civil and military positions of responsibility. Under his ownership the plantation he named Abram's Plains prospered from the raising of tobacco, as did much of the northern Piedmont. The rear portion of the present house and a structure near the main house are believed by descendants to date from this eighteenth century period. The present front portion of the house, a well-preserved and representative example of regional Greek Revival domestic architecture, is believed to have replaced the earlier house in 1830, and to have been built for Smith's granddaughter and her husband, Sara P. Smith Downey and Samuel Smith Downey. The property has remained for seven generations in the hands of Smith descendants.

Criteria Assessment: *Approved*

- Associated with the establishment in the mid-eighteenth century and continuation and expansion through the antebellum period of prosperous tobacco plantations in the northeastern Piedmont section of North Carolina; and with the rare but important continuous family ownership in the state.
- Associated with the life of Samuel Smith, locally prominent military and civil leader in the eighteenth century in Granville County.
- Embodies in the 1830's house the double pile plan and simplified classical detail of regional Greek Revival plantation domestic architecture, as well as some components of regional mid-eighteenth century construction components in the 1760's house.

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In 1766 Samuel Smith (1729-1800), his wife and three children, left Essex County, Virginia, and moved to Granville County, North Carolina. Smith purchased land in the Grasse Creek area near Buffalo Creek, and there he began the construction of his plantation.¹ According to family tradition he selected a site for the family dwelling at the "edge of the plain of the Buffalo," where he had slaves excavate a cellar and a foundation for the house. There, descendants claim, he constructed a two-story frame house on a rock foundation with two large chimneys on the north side of the dwelling. Smith's descendant also maintain that the dining area was in the basement and food was brought from an adjacent kitchen. Samuel Smith named his new plantation Abram's Plains after the 1759 British victory at the Plains of Abraham in Quebec during the French and Indian (Seven Year's) War. One of Samuel Smith's descendants, Jonathan K. T. Smith of Memphis, Tennessee, testifies that Smith was not at the famous battle "being only a nominal member of the Essex militia but "he still took this great victory to heart."²

Smith rendered valuable service in Granville County in the eighteenth century. In 1771 he was appointed a justice of the peace, and he served as a member of the Committee of Safety in Hillsboro District at the outbreak of the American Revolution. When the Granville Regiment of the North Carolina Militia was organized in 1775 Smith was commissioned a major in the regiment. He was promoted to Colonel in 1778, but ^{a year later} in that same year he resigned his commission and resumed his office as Justice of the Peace. During the Revolution he sold considerable provisions and supplies to the revolutionary government. In August, 1789, the Magistrates of Granville County appointed Smith sheriff of the county. He served in that capacity until 1791.³ In ~~1796~~ ^{the late 18th century} the Spewmarrow District, where Smith resided and represented as a justice, was renamed Abram's Plains District in honor of his plantation.

In addition to his public and military service, Samuel Smith ran a profitable tobacco plantation. Like most of his neighbors Smith devoted most of his time to the planting, cultivating, and curing of tobacco, and many log tobacco barns were scattered throughout his plantation. Typical of North Carolina plantations of the period Abram's Plains was self sufficient, containing vegetable gardens and livestock as well as shoe-making, carpentry, and blacksmith shops. ~~One family tradition claims that Samuel Smith required his sons to spend one year as apprentice to each of the three trades before they received a professional education.~~ At his death in 1800 Smith's estate included thirty-three slaves.⁴

Several of the extant buildings at Abram's Plains Plantation were probably built by Samuel Smith in the second half of the eighteenth century. But, according to family tradition, Smith's granddaughter, Sarah Pomfret Smith Downey, and her husband, Samuel Smith Downey, razed a large part of the original mansion house in 1830 and built a new structure on the same foundation. The later home is also connected to a part of the old structure by halls and stairways. Downey was a successful planter who, according to the 1850 census, owned 94 slaves. His wife died in the same year that tradition claims the

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house was renovated.⁵

Descendants of Samuel Smith testify that an earthquake in 1886 cracked some of the plaster walls of the house and shattered the ceiling medallions. Jonathan K. T. Smith who "spent a good many nights there as a young man" has described a past visit to the house:

From the front (west) gallery of 1830 addition, one entered the mansion through a typical plantation door, with glass sidelights and transom, into a large hall, at the east end of which was the stairway, to the right, which led to the second floor, consisting of four large bedrooms, and the third floor (the garret). The original porch was a small, classical portico, removed in later years for the more convenient, long country gallery.

The diningroom was located just opposite the stairway, to the left as one ascended it; from this room one would walk back to the old portion, later converted into a kitchen. Just before reaching the kitchen, to the right, was the Y staircase, the left segment of which led to a small chamber in the old section, where in after years the castaway plunder of the family was kept, including scores of valuable old books. The right stairway lead steeply (lighted by a tiny window) into the 1830 addition. The porch or patio of flagstone lay as an inset behind the newer and older parts of the house; from this porch one would descend into the oldest cellar with its quaint fireplace. Entrance to the newer basement was also from this same porch.

Not far from the east side of the house is located a graveyard for blacks. It contains about 200 graves, some of which belonged to the slaves of the Smith family.⁶

When Samuel Smith died in 1800 he left his Granville plantation property to his widow, Mary Webb Smith. She died in 1827 only about a month before her son, Alexander Smith. Apparently at their deaths the Smith plantation passed to Alexander Smith's widow Ann A. Beasley Smith.⁷ She retained the property until her death in 1828 when it ~~1827~~ evidently passed to her daughter, Sara (Sally) Pomfret Smith who in 1829 at the age of 15 married Samuel Smith Downey, her first cousin.⁸ Sara Smith Downey died in the following year and apparently ownership of Abram's Plains passed to her husband, Samuel Smith Downey, who left the property to their daughter, Ann Alexander Smith Downey, in 1851. She married Isaac H. Davis two years later. He died in 1884 having stated in his will of 1871 that she should "retain the homestead" at his death. Ann Alexander Smith Downey Davis died in 1914 and awarded the plantation property to the heirs of her son Joseph Jonathan Davis who had died in 1905.⁹ Davis's heirs subsequently sold the property to William Pressley Davis who still owns it.

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Footnotes

1. Granville County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Granville County Courthouse, Oxford, Deed Book H: 190, 242-243, 296.
2. Jonathan K. T. Smith "The Samuel Smith Family and the Abram's Plains Mansion House," in unpublished manuscript, Historic Preservation Section, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, pp. 4, 8.
3. Walter Clark (ed.), The State Records of North Carolina (Winston and Goldsboro State of North Carolina 16 volumes, 1895-1906), X, 207, 215; XXI, 1064, 1074; Granville County List of Taxables, 1796-1802, Archives, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, p. 40.
4. Smith, "Abram's Plains Mansion House," p. 4; William James Webb and others, Our Webb Kin of Dixie: A Family History (Oxford: W.J. Webb, 1940), p. 124; Granville County Estate Records, Samuel Smith, 1800, Archives, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Granville Estates.
5. Smith, "Abram's Plains Mansion House," p. 10; Seventh Census of the United States, 1050: Granville County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 6, Slave Schedule, 309-310.
6. Smith, "Abram's Plains Mansion House," p. 10.
7. Granville Estates, Samuel Smith, 1800, Alexander Smith, 1827.
8. Ibid., Ann A. Smith, 1828; Webb and others, Our Webb Kin, p. 136.
9. Granville County Will Books, Office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Granville County Courthouse, Oxford Will Book 18: 281, 23: 572; 26: 59.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Clark, Walter (ed.). The State Records of North Carolina. Winston and Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 16 volumes, 1895-1906.

Granville County Records, N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills, Estates, Miscellaneous Papers).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 36 1/4

UTM REFERENCES

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C			

Latitude NE 36° 29' 08"/SE 36° 28' 54"

Longitude SW 36° 28' 56"/NW 36° 29' 08"

NE 78° 30' 52"/SE 78° 30' 42"

SW 78° 30' 42"/NW 78° 30' 52"

B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Nominated acreage is the 36 1/4 acres of rural landscape still associated with the house and outlined in red on the plat map showing the division of the J. J. Davis "Mount Airy, land," September 25, 1916, labeled tract No. 1.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Description prepared by Alice Oviatt-Lawrence, Consultant
Significance prepared by Joe Mobley, Researcher

ORGANIZATION

Archives and History

DATE

September 13, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

109 E. Jones Street

TELEPHONE

733-6545

CITY OR TOWN

Raleigh, N.C.

STATE

North Carolina 27611

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ☐

STATE ☐

LOCAL ☒

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Edward D. Jones

TITLE

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

September 13, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Smith, Jonathan, K.T. "The Samuel Smith Family and the Abram's Plains Mansion House," an unpublished manuscript, Historic Preservation Section, N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Webb, William James and others. Our Webb Kin of Dixie: A Family History.
Oxford: W. J. Webb, 1940

Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Granville County, North Carolina,
Population Schedule, Slave Schedule.

